

The Real Meaning of the Disney Princess

By Anna Von Reitz



The thing about child abuse is that children, being children, don't know that they are being abused --- it doesn't have a name at the time, so they just suffer it in confusion.

The Abuser increases this confusion by endlessly repeating how much they "love" their victim while ripping open their little rectums and vaginas, or, as in my own case, beating them senseless on a daily basis and accused of all sorts of outlandish things you never did as an excuse for the punishment.

"Love" becomes synonymous with fear, pain, and betrayal at a primal level.

None of it makes sense, and this establishes a kind of semi-permanent cognitive dissonance.

You learn early to pay no attention whatever to what people say, and only take stock of what they do. You also learn to be preternaturally alert, always on your guard, "looking around the corner", ready to fight or to fly, observing every nuance and gesture and tone of voice.

And then, the secrecy element always appears. We have to keep this secret, just between us. Nobody else can ever know, and if they do, well, things will go very much the worse for the victim, or their Mother, or their little sister....

So beyond the fear and confusion of the actual abuse, fear of derivative consequences enters in. You are repeatedly told that

nobody can ever know and you must never show any wounds to anyone. You just have to suffer alone, and if you don't, even worse things will happen to you or to someone you dearly love.

You suck it up and soldier on.

In your struggle to make sense of the abuse, you deduce that you are sacrificing yourself to save your Grandmother or Mom or a sibling. This self-sacrifice becomes habitual.

I remember being nine or ten years old and accused of performing fellatio on a elderly and thoroughly innocent old man who was a neighbor of ours. My Mother beat me and screamed at me and left dozens of welts on my back from willow switches. Meanwhile, I had no idea what "fellatio" was. No idea of what a real penis even looked like at that point in my life. The beating went on from about four in the afternoon until Walter Kronkite broke in with the Evening News.

I crawled under my bed and laid still, except for the involuntary trembling and wincing of my bruised and ravaged skin. My dog came to comfort me. I fell asleep there and in the morning, I got up, washed my face, put on new school clothes and ran for the school bus without breakfast or seeing anyone else.

I was on my own, and grateful for it, even if I was starved.

Imagine how it feels to have nowhere to go, except to return to that same house, with the same irrational, unpredictable woman waiting for you? Imagine never knowing what to expect? Kisses and crumpets or wild, flailing, screaming terror?

She was careful never to do it when my Father might walk in. She was careful to leave no marks where he might see them. On some level, it was rational, even planned.

By age eleven, thankfully, I had thought it all over and decided that my Mother was crazy. That preserved my own sanity for another five years. At age sixteen, she came at me one final time, and I hauled off and dropped her unconscious on the kitchen floor.

At the time, I thought I'd killed her and nearly broke down in hysteria -- but not quite. I was too strong by then to give into any fleeting unexamined emotion. Instead, I checked her pulse and waited for her to wake up, which she did, rubbing her neck and jaw.

And here is the really, really, really queer thing: from then on, and for the rest of her life, (1) she never touched me again; and (2) so far as she was concerned, we had always been best friends and enjoyed the most trusting and loving relationship as Mother and Daughter.

Anyone hearing her talk or observing her behavior around me would ever suspect anything but the most cordial relationship.

Was it some bizarre Rite of Passage? Fear that I would kill her if there was a next time? Some kind of delusional denial? I bought a lock for my bedroom door and still never relaxed around her.

Years later my older Sister admitted that she had had the same experience growing up, and also confided that our Mother had been abused in the same way by our Grandmother. It was multi-generational trauma.

Our Mother did this to us, because it had been done to her. She had no other model of how to interact with her own children, and so.... two more lives, my Sister's and mine, were scarred by the same violence and craziness.

My Sister mourned the fact that she "never had a Mother" her entire life and never really came to terms with it. I, the Born Stoic, chalked it up to my original determination, that she was crazy, and that was all there was to it.

No other explanations needed.

I regretted that I could never actually love my Mother, but, as time had proven, I didn't need her to exist. She didn't need me to exist. I let her have her fantasy about our closeness and the happy-happy relationship that never existed.

About a year before her death at 96, I visited her in her nursing home and all the nurses and doctors were secure in believing that I was her beloved and successful daughter and there had never been anything but fresh air and sunshine between us. But when a nurse's aide dropped a metal tray on the floor, I still jumped as if I'd been stabbed.

That, more than anything else, told the truth of it -- though nobody there caught the drift.

I didn't go back for her funeral. That fell on my older sister, Emma, by agreement, because I had to do the Last Rites duties for our Father, alone, when I was only twenty-five, and pay for it, too.

Years later, a man who knows me well and has known me for twenty years, was reminiscing about how we met and his first impressions of me. To my surprise, he said I was scary -- because "I was so complete and independent. So self-sufficient, all by yourself."

I explained that fear of not being good enough drives one to excel, and fear of vulnerability drives one to stand by oneself, whether or not that's what you really want or need.

The Disney Princess in her castle on the hill, sleeping in an eternal silence, waiting for the kiss of true love to awaken her, or simply waiting all by herself, day after day, year after year, for Prince Charming to arrive, is an archetype of child abuse.

While we all root for her and Prince Charming, the truth is that she has to awaken herself, has to learn to love and know herself all by her own little lonesome. Only then, when she has learned to be comfortable with herself, when she has observed her own self-respect, and credited her own strength, can self-love give her the invincible strength and knowledge of all that she has overcome.

Only then, by her own determination, is she free to love and be, and not care what anyone else may think. Only then is her child-self vindicated and lasting peace established.

I decided to be a good woman and to never abuse my own child, and so it was that I broke the multi-generational curse. I shielded all the children that chanced to be around me. I watched for the signs of child abuse.

I sat across the dinner table, looking at the man I have known and who has been my friend for twenty years, and I said, "Isn't it funny that you can know someone for twenty years and never know such a fundamental thing about them, that they are a survivor of child abuse?"

He agreed, and he looked quickly away, as if he should have known, but that isn't fair either. He finally nodded and said, "I guess we just never turned over that rock."

Turn over the rocks.

Not in a selfish "I was horribly abused! Look at me!" attention-getting way, not to provoke or absorb pity, but simply to be honest and reveal the extent of the trauma our entire culture has suffered --- so maybe we can begin to organize ourselves and deal with it.

We are a-wash in people who have been abused, who are trying to recover from severe traumas, who are half-alive because of what they have endured, people who are still injured, still feeling confused, still bearing the burdens of secrets and shadows and silence.

I smiled and my companion didn't have any idea why I was smiling. I was thinking, "Well, so here I am, the Disney Princess, and I am my own Prince Charming."

Granna

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